THE NEW ROYAL EXCHANGE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE BUILDER.

SIR,—The fact of a building being new seems with many critics a strong argument in favour of its excellence in an architectural light; the New Post Office when erected was extolled as a superior specimen of genius, the general feeling now hardly bears out the assertion. The critics of the day seem to have acted the same farce in their comments upon the Exchange; with but very few exceptions, every one seems to vie with others in the amount of praise and effusion of admiration. I am the more inclined to make a few observations on the Exchange in consequence of seeing a wholesale commendation of it in a late number of the *Morning Herald*; the writer, however, offers but little argument in support of his praise, generally giving one-sided reasons, and following the well-beaten track of noticing only the excellence of the portico and windows; he also, in condemning the severity of a critic in the *Athenæum*, and attributing it to private pique, seems to forget that the same reasoning holds good in his case, his remarks being calculated to raise doubts in the mind of the reader whether he is not in an equal degree prejudiced in favour of Mr. Tite, with this one difference, that in the first case the criticism produced some good effect, whereas in the latter it is only calculated to mislead the public taste. In regard to the choice of the design, in the first instance: it would now seem to be of but little consequence, except that it admirably exposes the present partial and incompetent system of employing non-professional judges; to shew the rejected design was the best, it would hardly be necessary to enter into so very minute an examination of the designs; the fact that the profession generally were in favour of the other one, is not a small argument for such a supposition; as in most other competitions, *interest* awarded the prize.

Before noticing the building, it may not be irrelevant to inquire how far the style is suited for such an edifice: my opinion is that the many great faults and solecisms of the Italian style render it unfitted for the purpose. A large building in the Italian style may be pompous, but can never appear dignified, in consequence of extraneous embellishment taking place of the more legitimate methods of architectural richness; for instance, columns are seldom fluted,* friezes never ornamented, though the cornices are in most cases ornamented to the utmost extent; on the one hand, when it affects simplicity it approaches baldness, on the other fritter and heterogeneousness are mistaken for richness and novelty; and at all times there is a triviality attending it which detracts from the breadth and repose which are necessary for a large building.

But to proceed to the principal view from the Mansion House: the general effect is displeasing; the portico has a clumsy and heavy appearance (which, by the bye, is lessened by the effect of the sculpture in the tympanum, though some hypercritics have objected to its use on the score of style); the effect of the pediment is injured by the chimney-shafts, which want repose and pure outline; at the same time they would have been better omitted, for *an Exchange is not likely to associate ideas in the mind relative to fires*;† these, together with the lank appearance of the tower behind, entirely destroy repose, while at the same time they are not pleasing objects themselves. The whole view presents a ponderous mass, unrelieved by ornament, and produces an effect entirely different from that solid richness which unites strength and lightness, and which is a characteristic of this style. On a nearer approach, the effect is not better, the bareness and poverty of the soffit, the rough sculpture of the capitals, the overloaded cornice and general grossness of detail, do not tend to remove previous impressions. In fact, ordinary critics seem never to notice detail, contenting themselves with pointing out the beauty of the shade produced by the recessed pronaos in the centre, and the magnitude of the portico compared with others in London.

Much has been written about the extreme beauty of the portico, and the writer in the *Herald* goes so far as to say that it is without an equal in London; now a portico happens to be a very marketable commodity, never costing the architect much thought, being very easily copied from originals, and which can never fail in producing a certain amount of effect. Admitting, therefore, that the portico has a fine appearance, the admirers of Mr. Tite can only claim the merit of a successful copyist; it is for them to point out where the *effect* lies, and in what particular points the portico possesses originality and genius. We might as well attempt to draw conclusions from the portico of St. Martin's of the *delicate* taste of Gibbs, as to argue the superior genius of Mr. Tite from the portico of the Exchange. When, however, the before-mentioned writer goes so far as to say that it is without an equal in the metropolis, he must have allowed his prejudice sadly to have blinded his judgment for overlooking the portico to the London University; in this the columns are most artistically arranged, which, together with the correctness of the style, the classical arrangement, and the beautiful and effective distribution of simplicity and richness most admirably combined, form an *ensemble* at once striking, on account of the pure original taste displayed, and, I think, in artistic effect unequalled.

But to make a few remarks on the south façade:—here the poverty in design of the shops is at once manifest, more especially when compared with the overburthening ornament above; this is more apparent in the two central shops, where the mass of sculpture above seems without support, and in the north front, where the two niches produce a most disagreeable effect of solid above void. Much as I deplore the frequent use of miscalled Greek dressings to windows, which are Greek in every thing but *spirit*, being generally of most meagre and poor design, I certainly cannot go to the other extreme of the Italian school, and countenance windows which have a striking likeness to picture-frames. The massiveness of the dressings to the windows of the Exchange, the immense cornices overburthened with ornament, together with the size of the frames, fail of producing a happy result, however praiseworthy the attempt of the architect at originality may have been. The pedestals to the pilasters have a dwarfish appearance, and want the addition of a connecting line at bottom, such as two or three steps leading to the shops, which would have formed a horizontal line for the eye, and have given to the pilasters an appearance of connection, which they now want. The tower, I think, has received universal disapprobation: it cannot be said to be composed of harmonious lines; it groups badly in every point of view with the building, and looks like most after-thoughts,—not a part of the original design. Every view of the Exchange presents the same heavy appearance; misplaced solidity and overburthened ornament in one part, the extreme of poverty in another. The building has the faults of the Italian style without that picturesque appearance which sometimes proves a strong apology for its grossness of detail; the bad outline and unmeaning ornament, produce an effect massive but not grand, ornamented but not rich,—a number of parts fail by contrast to produce a harmonious whole.

These remarks must be considered rather as crude impressions than a studied criticism; the numberless praises lavished on the Exchange seemed to me so unfounded, that I could not resist the opportunity of endeavouring to expose their fallacy. At some future time I may endeavour to give a more minute and enlarged criticism, together with some remarks on the interior; I have purposely omitted any mention of the east and north fronts on account of the numerous obstructions preventing a complete view of them.

One thing amuses me very much: in nearly every engraving of the Exchange that I have seen, the building is shewn as viewed from a position inaccessible without the removal of the Globe Insurance Office and several other buildings; this seems to me to be little less than a fraud, and one which has no excuse, for the draughtsman might as well have given us the Exchange in a natural position as in any other; or might it not suggest the hint that the building has so little æsthetic merit as to require a little help from the artist to be made bearable when served up upon paper?

I remain, yours, &c.,

SCRUTATOR.

* [We do not subscribe to the opinion, that external columns should always be fluted, but think on many occasions those of the Corinthian order are best with their shafts plain, thereby giving an effect of repose, contrasting effectively and artistically with the richness of their capitals, reflecting clear light, avoiding the heaviness and seeming increase of bulk which columns assume when fluted, escaping the sooted appearance which external columns almost invariably acquire in London, and withstanding too the rough use of time and accident, which soon mutilate the fillets between their flutings. In the Tivoli example of the Corinthian order, the simplicity of the capital renders necessary fluting to the shafts of the columns, but in the Lothbury and Princes-street corner of the Bank, where the Tivoli order is used, the two interior columns, which are unfluted, contrasting with the others, have a wonderfully fine and artistic effect.—ED.]

† [We think Exchanges, considering two in succession have been destroyed by fire, and the present one is well-prepared to share the fate of its predecessors, do bring such ideas; also we cannot imagine any just taste in forming in England a habitable building as though no firing were to be used, since we know firing must and will be used therein: this we consider one of the items of false taste which sets critics at sea, and lowers the value of their labours, because they cannot be followed, for if in such buildings chimney-shafts are in the first instance omitted, a few years will be sure to bring them in some deforming shape.—ED.]

COLLECTIONS TOWARDS A GLOSSARY OF ARCHITECTURE.—No. X.

COLUMN—IONIC ORDER.

IN the second of the Greek orders, the Ionic, the column is rendered more slender than the Doric, the proportion being from about 8½ to nearly 9½ diameters high. This order has been called the Asiatic Greek, in opposition to the Doric, to which the name of European Greek has been assigned; and Mr. Hosking inclines to call the latter the "Greek sacred or triglyphed style;" and the Ionic, "the voluted style."

"The invention of the Ionic order of architecture appears to have been coeval with that which prevailed in European Greece; and, although chiefly confined at first to the Asiatic states, it became in the progress of time more generally attractive than the severe beauties of the rival style. The earliest specimen of which any remains are to be found is the celebrated Temple of Juno, at Samos, which, in the time of Herodotus, was considered as the largest and most stupendous edifice ever raised by Grecian art." (Lord Aberdeen's Inq. p. 159.) Its architects were Rhœcus and Theodorus, Samians by birth, and it was built about 540 B.C.

"The octostyle Temple of Bacchus, at Teos, is a heap of ruins, but enough remains to attest the exquisite beauty of the ancient edifice, and fully to justify the praises lavished by Vitruvius on the architect, Hermogenes of Alabanda. This artist seems to have effected a considerable change in the taste of his age by maintaining, with some others of equal merit, that the Doric order was unfit for temples. He was so deeply impressed with the truth of this notion, that he is said to have exchanged the materials which had been prepared for the construction of the Teian temple, in order that he might be enabled to complete the work in the Ionic style." (Lord Aberdeen's Inq. p. 168). The date of this building is about 440 B.C.

The temple of Apollo-Didymæus, near Miletus, was built about 376 B.C.; the architects were Peonius, of Ephesus (who finished the famous temple there of Diana), and Daphnis, of Miletus. "Three columns entire and a profusion of marble fragments scattered around, are all that remain of this once magnificent edifice; but these are of a description amply sufficient to indicate its former beauty and grandeur, even if they had not been so highly extolled by the uniform voice of antiquity." (*Ibid.* p. 169.)

"No doubt is left of the origin of the temple at Priene, as the dedication of the building to Minerva-Polias by Alexander of Macedon remains inscribed on a fragment of the walls. The architect was Pytheus, or, as he is sometimes called, Phileos; he joined with Hermogenes in his proscription of the Doric order." (*Ibid.* p. 169.)